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ABSTRACT

Parents of children attending a K-3 elementary school in New Mexico were surveyed by mail to examine Mexican-American and Anglo-American parental involvement in the school. Of 264 parents contacted, 24 Anglo-Americans, 19 Mexican-Americans, 1 African-American, and 6 individuals who did not identify their ethnic affiliation completed a questionnaire. Data were reported only for Mexican-American and Anglo-American parents. Results indicate that Anglo-American parents rated their children above average significantly more frequently than did Mexican-American parents. The most frequent type of involvement in the school, reported by both Anglo-American and Mexican-American respondents with annual incomes over $10,000, was attending conferences with teachers. The second most frequent activity for these parents was attending school-sponsored events. The most popular activity for Mexican-American parents whose annual income was below $10,000 was participation in fund raising projects for the school. The most frequent types of involvement for Anglo-American parents with annual incomes below $10,000 were attending parent-teacher conferences and attending school-sponsored functions. The reasons for involvement differ between the two groups: Mexican-Americans get involved because their children wanted them to do so; whereas Anglo-Americans get involved because they "want to help." This study suggests that school personnel should encourage parental involvement since it is associated with improved student achievement. (LP)

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Mexican-American and Anglo-American Parental Involvement with a Public Elementary School

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Paper presented at "Creating the Quality School," a national conference held at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, March 30 to April 1, 1992.

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Abstract

Parents of children attending a K-3 elementary school in New Mexico were surveyed in order to examine Mexican-American and Anglo-American parental involvement in the school. Two hundred sixty-four parents were contacted. Those parents who did not return the first questionnaire were provided with a second questionnaire. Twenty-four Anglo-Americans, 19 Mexican-Americans, 1 African-American, and 6 individuals who did not identify their ethnic affiliation completed the questionnaire. The most frequent type of involvement in the school, as reported by both Anglo-American and Mexican-American respondents, was conferring with teachers. Interest in their child's success motivated both groups most frequently. Implications of parental responses are discussed.

Mexican-American and Anglo-American Parental Involvement with a Public Elementary School

Although Mexican-Americans are the nation's second largest minority group (Arias, 1986), few researchers have examined Mexican-American parental involvement in the public schools. Investigators have found that this group values education and tends to perceive it as a springboard for upward mobility (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987). Anchor and Anchor (1974) found that a sample of Mexican-American parents of junior high school students attended parent-teacher conferences significantly more frequently when their children were succeeding academically than when they were failing. Stein (1983) and Lynch and Stein (1987) found that, among the parents of special education students they studied, the Mexican-American parents participated in their child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) significantly less frequently than Anglo-American parents.

Research findings suggest that parental involvement is beneficial. Children whose parents maintain frequent communication with the school tend to be higher-achieving than children whose parents interact infrequently with school personnel (Henderson, 1981). Epstein (1987) found a positive relationship between the frequency with which teachers encouraged parental

involvement, and the reading gains of first, third, and fifth graders. Parental tutoring has been associated with student reading gains (Epstein, 1984). Homebased reinforcement programs have been found to enhance students' academic performance (Henderson, 1981). Parental involvement programs with low-income, African-American inner city residents have also succeeded in increasing students' academic performance (Henderson, 1981). This survey was conducted to examine Mexican-American and Anglo-American parental involvement with a public elementary school.

Method

Subjects

Questionnaires were sent to 264 parents of children enrolled in kindergarten through third grade at an elementary school in southwestern New Mexico. Eighteen percent of the parents contacted returned completed surveys.

Four male and twenty female Anglo-Americans completed and returned the questionnaire. The ages of these respondents ranged from 26 to 50 years. Their average age was 36 years.

Nineteen Mexican-American females also completed the questionnaire. The average age of this group was 34. Their ages ranged from 26 to 46. The modal annual income for Mexican-American and Anglo-American parents was below $10,000.

One male and five female respondents did not identify their ethnic affiliation. One African-American mother also completed

the survey.

Thirty-two respondents completed the first questionnaire that was delivered. Eighteen parents completed the second questionnaire provided to them.

Materials

Coded questionnaires and cover letters were mailed to 264 parents. The questionnaires solicited demographic information in addition to information relating to the parents' involvement with the school.

Six questionnaires were returned because the addressee had moved. Those non-respondents to the initial mailing who had not moved were sent the questionnaire and cover letter again two weeks after the first mailing. All questionnaires were accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope for return of the questionnaire.

Results

Data from the six respondents who did not identify their ethnic affiliation, and from the one African-American respondent, are not reported because this investigation focuses on Anglo-American and Mexican-American parents. Parents were asked about their perceptions of their children's academic status. Mexican-American parents most frequently rated their children as "average," followed by "above average" as the second most frequent rating. Anglo-American parents most frequently indicated that their children were "above average," followed by "average."

A chi-square analysis revealed that Anglo-Americans rated their children "above average" significantly more frequently than did Mexican-American parents ($\chi^2 = 5.88$; $p < .05$). chi-square

A frequency distribution presenting the types of activities parents were involved in appears in Table 1.

Insert Table 1

about here

Attending parent-teacher conferences was the most common activity for Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans whose incomes were above $10,000. The second most frequent activity for these parents was attending school-sponsored events.

The most popular activity for Mexican-American parents whose annual income was below $10,000 was participation in fundraising projects for the school. Attending parent-teacher conferences was the second most frequent activity for this group. The most frequent types of involvement for Anglo-American parents with incomes below $10,000 per year were attending parent-teacher conferences and attending school-sponsored functions. The next most popular activity for this group was helping with fundraising projects.

The top-ranked reasons Mexican-American parents gave for their school involvement were: interest in child's success, child

encouraged contact, to provide input to school, and to obtain information. The top-ranked reasons for school involvement given by Anglo-American parents were: interest in child's success, wanting to help, to provide input to the school, and to obtain information.

The suggestions Mexican-American parents most frequently gave for enhancing parent involvement were: offer more activities that involve parents, encourage parents to participate, communicate more with parents, offer more programs, and cooperate with parents. The top suggestions given by Anglo-American parents were: encourage parents to participate, offer more programs, cooperate with parents, and place fewer demands on parents.

The Anglo-American parents were most frequently contacted about school-related events. Fundraising was the second most frequent reason this group was contacted. The Mexican-American parents who responded to the survey were most frequently contacted about fundraising, or because the school requested their involvement. Children's behavioral problems and offering information were the second most frequent reasons for contact.

Discussion

Only 18 percent of the parents contacted participated in the survey. Parents who were involved with the school might have been more prone to complete and return surveys. Epstein's (1984) survey of 3,698 elementary school teachers and 600 principals in

Maryland indicated that about 70% of the parents the respondents dealt with never helped the teacher in the classroom or on class trips. These respondents also indicated that about 70% of the parents never participated in fundraising activities for the school.

Respondents to this survey appear to have a greater degree of involvement. Thirty-three percent of Anglo respondents and 15% of Mexican-American respondents served as room mothers. Fifty-seven percent of Mexican-American parents and 33% of Anglo parents participated in fundraising for the school.

In this sample, parents in both low and higher income ranges were involved with the school. Lower-income parents, regardless of ethnicity, were more involved with school fundraising than were parents whose annual income was $10,000 or above. This involvement by low-income parents is consistent with reports that low-income parents are willing to participate in their children's education and to implement suggestions made by teachers (Henderson, 1981).

The reasons Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans gave for their involvement differed. A leading reason that Mexican-American parents became involved with the school was that their child wanted them to do so. Anglo-American parents did not mention this reason for involvement. The Mexican-American respondents' reference to their children's desires may reflect the

strong family orientation of this ethnic group (Escover & Lazarus, 1982). Similarly, the most frequently-given suggestion for encouraging parental involvement by Mexican-American respondents--offer more activities that involve parents--may also reflect the strong family orientation of this group. Anglo-American parents did not make this suggestion.

Anglo-Americans gave "wanting to help" as a reason for involvement five times more frequently than did Mexican-American respondents. This finding may be due to cultural differences. Some researchers who have investigated Mexican-American attitudes report that many members of this group hold education and teachers in high regard (Lynch & Stein, 1987). These Hispanics often believe that teachers and school personnel know best. Anglo-Americans who are not as prone to put teachers and schools on pedestals may be more likely to offer assistance.

Many respondents to the survey indicated that school personnel contacted them about fundraising or to convey information. Since parental involvement with the schools has been associated with improved student achievement (Henderson, 1991), school personnel might consider encouraging a greater degree of parental involvement.

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Table 1

Percentage of Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans in Two Income Groups Participating in Activities with the School

Activity	Ethnicity: Mexican-American	Ethnicity: Anglo-American
	Below $10,000	
	(9)	(10)
Attend parent-teacher conferences	77%	90%
Serve as room mother	22%	40%
Attend school board meetings	11%	40%
Participate in Parent Advisory Committee meetings		40%
Fundraising projects	100%	60%
Attend school-sponsored functions	66%	90%
Helps when needed	11%	20%
	$10,000 & above	
	(10)	(14)
Attend parent-teacher conferences	100%	85%
Serve as room mother	10%	28%
Attend school board meetings	10%	7%
Participate in Parent Advisory Committee meetings	40%	50%
Fundraising projects	50%	50%
Attend school-sponsored functions	70%	78%
Helps when needed		7%